

Naval Aviation Enterprise: "The most powerful thing in Aviation in a long time"

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By Naval Aviation Enterprise Public Affairs

SAN DIEGO, Ca. – Small business owners attending the 22nd Annual Navy Gold Coast Small Business Conference at the San Diego Convention Center last week were greeted with an unexpected, welcome message about the importance of energy efficiency and the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE) approach to cost-wise readiness from U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Thomas Conant, Commanding General of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing.

Conant was invited to "Gold Coast" to provide the small business industry a better understanding of the NAE methods of transparent, cross-functional processes that support cost-wise readiness requirements and which help Naval Aviation leadership make risk-balanced decisions.

As a self-described "customer" of the benefits of increased transparency, metrics, and collaboration that bolster Navy and Marine Corps Aviation readiness, Conant commented that the NAE "is probably the most powerful thing we've done in Aviation in a long time."

Conant explained that the Enterprise advantage is about gathering together stakeholders across the full spectrum of Aviation -- the people involved in buying a part, working the maintenance on that part, putting together an airplane, putting the plane on the flight line, getting written onto the flight schedule, and of course the pilot and aircrew that fly the system – to come forward and look at, then collaborate on, the best and most cost effective ways to approach the readiness of Navy and Marine Corps aircraft.

"The AV-8B Harrier is probably in the best shape it has ever been, in over 20 years of service," said Conant, "without a doubt, because the NAE has taken a holistic look at readiness."

Conant also warned that there is closer scrutiny of costs and asked the audience not to bring slide shows to present a product, but rather "come with a product that works, that is reliable, and does what you say it will do." He made an unexpected correlation to energy as he talked about a Marine Corps special project to focus on creating an energy-sufficient force that is not reliant on generators.

Armed with just a few overhead slides, Conant outlined how a Marine Air-Ground Task Force, the USMC principal organization that coordinates across a range of military operations, has grown over the last nine years of the war, with a 300% increase in radios and IT/Computers, 200% increase in the number of vehicles and a 40% increase in vehicle weight, which impacts ships and loading. He also described a 30% decrease in miles per gallon of fuel as the vehicles become heavier.

"Excluding manpower, [Marine] Companies have more equipment and use more fuel than Battalions did 10 years ago," stated Conant. "So what this is really about is losing the precious resources of the U.S., losing Marines on convoys."

Conant went on to explain that there is one Marine killed for every 24 fuel convoys on the road, and asked the audience to think about how much fuel is required to maintain our force on any given day. He also reported that one Marine is killed for every 29 water convoy, where trucks are trying to transport the necessary water to keep the force fighting.

"So we want to know if we can generate our own water and also help out with all of our fuel demands," conveyed Conant. "For the Marine Corps, this is about saving lives."

Small business CEO Souheil Saliba, of Five9 Network Systems, hailed the speech as stirring and said he has a new perspective on what his work really means in terms of saving lives. He said he "feverishly wrote down notes about the general's focus on energy efficiency."

"Comments like that," relayed Saliba, "are what force our companies to consider 'how low can we go' with energy efficiency," and described Conant's remarks as refreshing, to be told what the leaders really need.

"We're typically looking for bells and whistles in this business," said Saliba, "but what I heard Maj. Gen. Conant say was 'don't make your product too complex...make it work.'"

The purpose of Navy Gold Coast Small Business Opportunity Conference is to provide a forum to educate, guide, and assist businesses, especially small businesses, in working with the government, primarily the Department of Defense.

For more information about the Naval Aviation Enterprise, please visit www.public.navy.mil/airfor/nae.